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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PROP](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#) [TW](#) [EINT](#)
SUBJECT: INCREASED GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP OF POLITICAL
DISCUSSIONS ON CHINESE INTERNET IN 2009

REF: CPF20090206538001 CHINA -- OSC ANALYSIS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Aggressive censorship is making it more difficult to hold political discussions online, according to multiple bloggers and online activists. While contacts differed on whether the ongoing "anti-vulgarity" campaign was being employed as cover for the political tightening, all agreed that concerns over social stability were leading to greater government scrutiny of online content. Contacts also noted that, as in most online censorship campaigns in China, individual website operators, Internet service providers and online bulletin board editors are responsible for proactively removing objectionable content. Despite increased restrictions, however, Chinese websites continue to publish articles on sensitive political topics. End Summary.

Political Discussions Online Difficult

¶2. (C) Engaging in political discussion on the Internet has been more difficult in 2009 than in 2008, according to multiple contacts who regularly use the Internet to discuss political issues. Liu Xiaoyuan (protect) a Beijing-based legal activist and civil rights lawyer told PolOff in late January that the organizations that hosted his blogs had become more stringent about what they allowed him to post. Liu said that readers had complained because they were unable to post comments under articles on his blog. These limitations were part of a "preemptive attack on social and political activism" this year, said Liu. Zhang Dongchen, former deputy director of strategic partnerships at Baidu (China's top search engine) and currently assistant to the CEO, agreed in February that 2009 would be a year of tighter Internet control because of key anniversaries of such events as the founding of the People's Republic of China (October 1, 60th anniversary) and Tiananmen (June 4, 20th anniversary).

"Vulgar" Political Debate

¶3. (C) Contacts said that the "anti-vulgarity" (fan disu) campaign initiated on January 5 (see ref), ostensibly to remove sexually explicit material from the Internet, was being used to limit discussion of politically sensitive topics. Wang Zhongxia (protect), a Charter 08 signer who regularly uses his blog to advocate for pro-democracy political causes, said on March 18 that the anti-vulgarity campaign was "primarily" aimed at politically sensitive Internet discussions. As evidence, Wang noted that Chinese netizens had "little difficulty" viewing sexually explicit material online but politically

sensitive material was becoming harder to view. Ping Ke (protect), a popular and outspoken blogger and journalist, said on March 5 that while the campaign might originally have been conceived to combat pornographic material, "a lot of political material had also been censored." According to Liu Xiaoyuan, the Beijing-based lawyer, the Chinese government chose the word "vulgarity" (disu) to describe the object of the current campaign because the term was vague and could include political content. Campaigns in the past had been more specifically aimed at pornography, said Liu.

Censorship for Social Stability?

14. (C) According to Liu Xiaoyuan, the main impetus for the increased censorship was "fear of social instability." Liu noted that the official Chinese media predicted China would face many social stability challenges in 2009 and the government was therefore "taking preemptive action" against envelope-pushing Internet media. Liu Zhengrong, Deputy Director General of the State Council Information Office's Department of Internet Administration, told EmbOfs on April 2 that it was "especially important during this time of financial crisis to guard against information online that might cause instability." Liu said that the Chinese government censored online content related to "Taiwan, Tibet, Falungong and terrorism" because of those issues' potential to cause "social instability." Liu noted that China had recently blocked access to the video-sharing website Youtube because of content related to Tibet that

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was "aimed at causing trouble" (naoshi) and "could influence social stability." Liu, however, denied that the anti-vulgarity campaign was in any way political, asserting that its purpose was "to allow children to go online safely." Liu noted that the campaign was "still going on" and involved all six Chinese government agencies with a hand in Internet management.

No Censorship like Self-Censorship

15. (C) Li Yanhong (protect), founder and CEO of Baidu, China's most popular search engine, told PolOfs on February 12 that his company was required to be proactive about deleting "vulgar" material. Baidu, Li said, employed people to ensure that objectionable content did not appear on Baidu websites or in Baidu search results. Li noted that what was considered vulgar was "entirely subjective" and Baidu felt compelled to delete material that "smaller websites" might be able to post. According to Liu Zhengrong, individual Internet Service Providers (ISPs) were responsible for deleting or censoring objectionable material from their systems. Wang Zhongxia noted that the consequences for failure to police one's own website could include a forced shutdown of an entire site. According to Wang, Luo Yonghao's popular blog-hosting site, Bullog, had been shut down because Luo had failed "to self-censor political discussion" on the blogs he hosted. Wang said that he and others had used Bullog to promote Charter 08 before the site was taken off line.

Comment: Down But Not Out

16. (C) While contacts report tighter control of political discussion on the Chinese Internet, these controls have not stopped all online political discussion nor completely cowed China's more outspoken bloggers. Ping Ke reacted angrily to the implication that he might self-censor in the current environment, pointing to his recent discussion of the Tiananmen massacre (though referred to euphemistically as "6-4") as evidence that he had not

been intimidated. Similarly, Wang Zhongxia and Liu Xiaoyuan have continued to post articles promoting their political views online.
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